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SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA: *On Poise*

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The Path of Knowledge

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THE NEED FOR CLOSER CO-OPERATION AMONG WORLD RELIGIONS

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

WHEN I was asked to speak on this subject in this church this evening, I was very glad. I believe that closer co-operation among the religions is one of our greatest needs today. If the followers of the different religions of the world could rise to the spiritual level which co-operation between them requires and presupposes, this would, I believe, be a first step towards grappling on the spiritual plane with mankind's present-day tremendous common problems; and it is only on the spiritual plane that we can hope to solve them. Would-be economic or political solutions are only superficial solutions unless and until they are taken up to the spiritual level.

It is a particularly good thing to discuss this subject in a Christian Church.

Co-operation has till recently, been an unfamiliar idea among the followers of the three Judaic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. More than that, it has seemed to them an improper idea, indeed a shocking one. Co-operation has seemed a shocking suggestion because each of these three religions has traditionally involved the holding of an identical belief—the belief that *my* religion is not only true and right, so that every other religion must, in some degree, be false and

wrong. This would imply that it would be wrong to co-operate with any other religion's followers.

It was natural that the first Israelite monotheists should take this intransigent view that their own religion was uniquely true and right. They were unique among their contemporaries, so far as they knew, in being monotheists. The gods worshiped by their neighbors were, in their belief, not gods at all: they were imaginary gods who were, in truth, nonexistent. If Yahweh was the One True God the gulf between the worship of Yahweh and other religions was absolute.

In course of time, Judaism gave birth to two daughter monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, which made converts to monotheism on a scale that Judaism itself had never attempted. Between them, Islam and Christianity converted nearly half the human race to monotheism. Yet the followers of each of these three monotheistic religions have had much the same attitude to the other two as the followers of all three of them have had to non-monotheistic religions. They have regarded each other, too, as unbelievers who are outside the pale of true and right religion.

Islam, being the youngest of the three, has been more tolerant of Judaism and Christianity than either of these two has been of Islam or of each other. In the Qur'an it is declared that Jews and Christians are, like Muslims, "People of the Book": that is, that they, too, have a book which, like the Qur'an, has been revealed by God. Islam believes that the Torah and the New Testament, too, are revelations, and that they are true and right as far as they go. The Qur'an does not abrogate them (just as, in the Christian view, the New Testament does not abrogate the Torah). The Qur'an supplements and completes the Torah and the New Testament.

The Qur'an requires Muslims to tolerate and protect Jews and Christians if these agree to submit, politically, to

Muslim rule. All the same, Muslims have, in practice, regarded Jews and Christians in much the same way as these have regarded Muslims and each other. In Muslim eyes, Jewish and Christian monotheists have not been true believers.

All the principal living religions of the human race come from one or other of two relatively small patches of the inhabited part of the earth's surface. The Judaic religions come from southwest Asia; Hinduism and Buddhism come from India.

When we turn from the Judaic family of religions to the Indian group, we find a different traditional attitude towards co-operation here. For the followers of the Indian religions, co-operation is not something strange and wrong; it is something that is taken for granted.

In Japan, for instance, Buddhism has reached a compromise with Shintoism. Shinto gods have offered themselves to bodhisattvas, and have been accepted by them, to serve as their janitors. Japanese are often married by a Shinto priest, but buried by a Buddhist.

To imagine a parallel to this Japanese compromise in our own Judaic world, one must try to imagine that, here in Los Angeles, besides the Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, there are temples of the gods of our pre-Christian ancestors: the Teutonic gods certainly, and perhaps the Roman and the Greek gods as well. One must imagine the Christian ministers and the Jewish rabbis and the pagan priests agreeing together amiably to allocate among themselves the different services that each of them shall perform for the whole community. Every member of the community will be a Christian and a Jew and a pagan. He will not be a follower of any single religion exclusively.

This is the traditional situation, as between different religions, in India and Eastern Asia.

This friendly coexistence and co-operation between different religions in the Indian half of the civilized world has, I believe, a lesson for those of us who, by the accident of birth, happen to have been born and raised in the Judaic half of the world.

In our time, all sections of mankind have suddenly been brought into close physical contact with each other—and this at a moment when we have invented an annihilating weapon. We have to learn to live together—and this not only without fighting each other and without disapproving of each other. We have to learn to feel a positive respect and love for each other and for each other's religions.

Today we have to learn to do this for the sake of self-preservation; but it has always been right to do it, even in the time when self-preservation was not at stake—I mean, the time before 1945.

There seem to be signs of a change from mutual intolerance towards mutual toleration and esteem among the followers of the three Judaic religions, in spite of the intransigence that has been the traditional attitude of each of them.

1. Muslims and Christians, and, inside Western Christendom, Protestants and Roman Catholics have long since given up going to war with each other in the hope of either forcibly converting or exterminating the followers of the other religion.

2. Among Protestant Western Christians there is now an Ecumenical Movement for reuniting the splinter churches into which Protestant Christianity has broken up. Some Eastern Orthodox churches have joined this movement.

3. The Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of the present Pope seems to be less intransigent than ever before towards other Christian churches. This more charitable attitude has shown itself in the recent Vatican Council, of which there is to be a further session.

4. Muslims and Christians are beginning to recognize what they have in common as well as their differences.

If it is true that there is, today, an abatement of the traditional hostility between the different monotheistic religions of the Judaic family, we have still to ask ourselves some questions about this.

1. Is the motive expediency, rather than a belief that mutual esteem and co-operation are right in themselves?

2. Whatever the motive for the decrease in mutual intolerance may be, are mutual esteem and co-operation good in themselves?

Here we have come to the heart of the question that you have asked me to discuss with you today. This is, of course, not only the heart of it; it is also the most delicate point in it.

I shall therefore be rather hesitant and tentative in putting to you the reasons why I, personally, believe that close co-operation among the religions of the world is good—and would still be good, even if expediency did not call for it.

REASONS why mutual respect and co-operation are good absolutely:

1. The limitedness of human capacity for knowing what is true and right. The universe is only partially intelligible to human minds. It is partly mysterious: this is why human souls crave for divine revelation about the fundamental things in the universe, which seem to be beyond the comprehension of the unaided human mind.

Now, I may believe that, through the channel of my particular religion, I have received genuine revelation. I may believe in the *absolute* genuineness and authoritativeness of the revelation that has been given to me. But I know, as a fact of observation, that my fellow monotheists, the Jews and the

Muslims, have exactly the same belief about the different revelations that, in their belief, have been given to them. If we believe in the absolute truth and rightness of our own revelation as against the other two, only one of the three monotheistic religions can be absolutely right, and the other two—whichever these may be—must be at least partially wrong. But what human being is in a position to judge between them? We all believe that we have received our different revelations from the same God whom we all worship. Only God himself can judge which religion, if any, is true and right.

We know that, being human, we are fallible. We have to

FROM THE LIVES OF THE HOLY

The love of the guru can transform a life by discerning merit beyond all external appearances.

For an example of such perspicacity and love we may turn to the story of a remarkable Bengali saint named Haridas. Though a devout Hindu, he had been born a Muslim; thus in Hindu society he was considered "outside caste," unacceptable. He became a follower of Sri Chaitanya, who welcomed him with affection and regard. Always at a respectful distance, Haridas followed Sri Chaitanya to various places of pilgrimage. Then a touching scene took place, at the time when Haridas arrived in Puri, where Chaitanya had settled. Though urged by the devotees to go and be received by Chaitanya, Haridas refused, saying that he was of no caste and therefore not allowed to enter the temple, and he would not even approach it, feeling himself unworthy. He remained

face the possibility that we may have been at least partially mistaken in our belief about the revelation that has come our way. At least, we may be mistaken in believing that our own revelation has absolute validity as against the revelation that the followers of other religions believe that they have.

2. The nature of God, as this is conceived of by Judaic monotheists, makes it seem incompatible with his nature that he should have given authentic revelation to some single fraction of mankind alone.

We believe that God is absolutely powerful, just, and loving, and that he is the creator and father of all his crea-

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A SERIES ON SAINTLINESS IN PRACTICE

by the roadside, chanting the Lord's name, happy to be just in the vicinity of his guru. Sri Chaitanya came out to meet Haridas, who upon sight of the master fell prostrate at his feet. Chaitanya embraced his disciple and both shed tears of joy. But Haridas persisted: "Do not touch me, Master. I am only a low wretch." Chaitanya answered, "When I touch you I am purified by your perfect devotion. All austerities, pilgrimages, giving of alms—are unequal to the piety you acquire each moment. You are holier than a brahmin or sannyasin."

Chaitanya gave Haridas a room in the garden of the temple and sent him the *prasad* (the sacramental food offering) from the daily worship. Because Chaitanya perceived the beauty of his soul, Haridas avoided scorn and, indeed, became a respected comrade of the devout men of his day.

tures. Christians have the further belief that God has given a practical demonstration of this love for all human beings by voluntarily submitting, for our sake, to the sufferings that are of the essence of being human.

If this picture of God's character is correct, then God, if he has revealed himself at all, must surely have revealed himself to all men and must have offered to all of us an opportunity for salvation. If so, all religions must contain divine revelation, at least in some degree.

This conclusion will be taken as a matter of course by the followers of the religions of the Indian family.

3. All religions, the Indian and the Judaic alike, have one identical purpose: they all aim at helping individual human beings to deal with human sin and suffering. The spiritual salvation of human souls is their common goal. They have different conceptions of salvation, and different prescriptions for attaining it, but salvation is the objective of all of them.

4. While human nature is fundamentally uniform, there seem to be different variations on our fundamentally identical spiritual make-up. It is conceivable that each of the different religions may contain a partial revelation that is particularly helpful for some particular variety of our common human nature.

IN OUR TIME, every human soul, whatever its particular psychological make-up may be, is up against the same formidable problem. The huge increase in the scale and complexity of social life has upset the balance between the individual soul and its social environment. The power of social forces, and the pressure of these on the individual, have become so great that, under this pressure of collective power, the individual

feels impotent and helpless. He is tempted to despair of being able to take an effective action, and he is therefore tempted to resign himself to being carried along passively by society, instead of obeying his conscience when it tells him—as it often does—to stand up against society and to oppose society at his peril.

If we give in to this temptation, we are abdicating from being moral creatures, with the duty of distinguishing between right and wrong and doing what, to the best of our belief, is right. To put our conscience to sleep is to dehumanize ourselves. But how can the individual find the strength to hold his own against present-day society? I believe that religion alone can help the human soul to hold its own. I also believe that all religions have help of this kind to give us. I therefore believe that the human race needs the co-operation of all the religions with each other. It needs this to help us to cope with the gigantic social forces that we have conjured into existence.

HOW TO GAIN POISE

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA

ONCE, standing near Niagara Falls, and hearing the thunderous roar, I wondered what that tremendous commotion was all about. I thought: When did it begin, and when would it end; when would it come to a state of perfect poise? The only conclusion I could reach was that this commotion, this thunderous uproar, this tremendous agitation, would come to a state of perfect tranquillity, poise, and rest only when the upper and the lower levels would be one and the same. The upper basin is constantly pouring a tremendous quantity of water into the lower one. The lower basin is receiving it, but it cannot retain it; it is spending the supply all the time. Yet, from above, the gigantic supply is always rushing into it. If, somehow or other, the lower basin could contain the supply and rise to a higher level, and attain the level of the upper basin, there would be no more tumult, no more uproar, no agitation of any kind.

In much the same way, human life is receiving a supply from "above," but our containers do not know the art of conserving the supply and rising to a higher level. If, by conserving the supply, we could rise to a higher level and become one with the source of supply, that would mark the end of all the agitation, the tumult, and the commotion in

our inner beings. Man must be one with God if he wants to attain to a state of perfect poise. As long as he occupies a lower level, as long as he is spending all his energy in the outer world, in short, as long as he does not know what use to make of the constant supply which is rushing into him, he must suffer, there must be lack of tranquillity and poise.

So, my friends, if you want me to give you the answer to the question "How to Gain Poise," I will say, there is only one way to gain it—to bring the level of humanity to the same level with God. Let us realize God. Let us know that all of our senses, our mental faculties, nay, every atom of our being, is completely surcharged and saturated with God; I am God. God the eternal source of perfection, of infinite bliss, knowledge, and existence is my real Self. Let your goal be to attain God. If you forget that, if you reject God from the plan of your life you may occasionally get a little peace and poise when you unconsciously touch that divine Source, but you cannot attain complete and lasting tranquillity and poise unless you have been united with God, unless you have been completely filled with God.

The average man, I think you will agree, does not consider poise to be of much value; he does not aspire to attain it. Most people are rushing headlong towards the objects they want to gain, and in their eagerness to fill their senses with things, in enjoying the excitement of the moment, they do not feel the lack of poise. Only when they meet with some obstructions to their enjoyment do they feel the lack of it. Then they think that perhaps a little more poise might have assisted them in gaining their desired objects. You will find that when we are overpowered by disappointments, anxieties, worries, and fears, we feel the need of the healing balm of peace and poise. Thus under such circumstances, we conceive of these as a means for the attainment of material objects.

In that sense it is true that people want peace and poise, but for what purpose? Have they been convinced that to attain peace and poise is the goal? No. Ordinarily, people consider these qualities just as a means by which they can sharpen their faculties in order to attain something they desire. We get a little power and that, again, we exhaust by chasing shadows. However, a time comes, eventually, when we change our attitude. A time comes when we consider tranquillity and poise as the goal, not as the means for gaining any objects, and when one reaches that goal, the final state of peace and poise, he can declare: "I do not care what comes to me or what goes from me. I only care for absolute poise, for tranquillity, and peace within." When this is achieved, man's consciousness comes almost to the level of God-consciousness. He feels that there is nothing more to be attained. To quote a Sanskrit saying: "He has attained That, attaining which nothing remains to be attained." That final achievement can be described in terms of absolute peace, infinite poise, and perfect tranquillity. The human soul then lives in the state of divine bliss, but it goes without saying that such a state of realization comes to the lot of a very few. The rest are struggling to attain a certain degree of peace and calm, and the majority seek it only as a means for the attainment of desirable objects.

Now, even if you consider the attainment of these qualities only as a means for obtaining material objects, still you should analyze to find out the cause of the obstructions you meet with. Suppose, at the present moment you want to be a successful businessman; you want to gain more efficiency and power. That is your goal for the time being. If you find that a little disappointment in your business contacts, or some

irritation in your transactions, throws your mind whirling, you will look to controlling your reactions, your mental faculties, and adjusting your outlook on things. In order to do that you will have to analyze yourself. Why is it that a little trouble or disappointment throws your mind into a turmoil? What is behind your irritation and your anger? The first and perhaps the most important cause of disturbance that we cherish within is fear. No other cause creates such turmoil in our consciousness as this one enemy, fear. Analyze yourself carefully; go back to situations when you were upset, when you could not think straight, when you were irritated and lost your temper. Go deep into the cause, and you will discover that fear was lurking somewhere within, fear of losing your money, your friends, your prestige and position in life, your dignity, and so on. Fear weakened you and created a tumult in your consciousness; it robbed you of your strength, your poise, and your power.

Fear in the last analysis, is caused by lack of balance. Let us consider a concrete situation. Imagine there is a shipwreck and the passengers are very excited. In fact, they are frantic with fear. They are thinking of how precious their lives are, and of all the attachments they have to leave behind them. Do you think they could maintain any peace and poise at all? Even if they did seem to do so, I would say that although they might not be showing the tempest within, still they are afraid of losing their lives. Let us imagine the existence, in the midst of this group of people, of a person who is full of the consciousness that he is one with the divine Source, that it is God's power which is moving in his personality, in his individual form. He knows that death means nothing but the loss of the form, which is completely filled with God. He will be able to maintain tranquillity, calm, and poise in any situation because there is no fear in his

consciousness. He is united with God. Nothing can be taken away from him. It is only when we make matter our God and live for the thrill of the senses alone that death chases us like a bloodhound.

Of course, there is a difference of degree in the attainment of poise. One type of person may lack it completely; another may be able to maintain some amount of it; and a third may be established in God-consciousness, which is infinite peace and poise. Now what is the cause of the difference? The difference lies in the degree to which God-realization or perfection has been achieved. A person who has not been able to see perfection anywhere will be thrown into despair when anything threatens to do damage to his attachments and possessions, because he thinks they are the only things that can give him satisfaction and happiness. He will be overcome by agitation and fear, and will lose his balance completely. Suppose you find yourself at that stage of understanding. I would like to ask you a question. Why do you depend so hopelessly upon these things? You may try your best to gain more peace and poise through your contacts and experiences in the outer world, but these endeavors will prove to be nothing but patchwork. Can you tell me any circumstance in which the external world brought you any satisfaction and peace? Do you think your possessions give you any lasting satisfaction? I doubt it very much. However, there is something within you which will make you really contented, will satisfy all your desires. Of that I am certain. Hearing these words, perhaps you will stop and think about it, but only after repeated disappointments in your contacts with the world, after experiencing many sorrows and sufferings, tortures and tears, will you learn to turn towards that Source within.

The second type, the intermediate one, already has some

conviction regarding the existence of that Source within, that inner blissful Self, but he has not yet been able to depend upon it completely. If he does not achieve the success he thought would bring him happiness, if he meets with obstructions, he knows he has something to turn to, something within, and so he is not as disturbed as the first type. That is the great advantage of those who have attained this intermediate stage. They have not achieved the goal, but at least they have some conviction of the existence of that infinite Source within. And that itself is a great achievement. If you find yourself in that category, if you find that you are able to remain calm and poised under disturbing conditions, or if, fortunately, all of your contacts with this world are peaceful and full of happiness, even then you should analyze the situation carefully. You have to remember that your relationships and possessions have not created the happiness you feel. Your wealth, your relatives, your beautiful children—none of these has created this condition of happiness in you. Your happiness has always come from within. It was always that inner divinity shining out on the external objects which gave you the satisfaction and happiness you experienced. Even though you may feel that there is something within which is expressing itself in all your happiness, even though you may think that you have somewhat conquered fear, even though you may believe that your consciousness has attained to a higher level, still, if something threatens to take away from you these objects you will react, you will become upset. That means that you have not yet attained to the stage when you depend entirely upon God. You have not yet established a real contact, an inalienable relationship with God.

This is the condition of the intermediate type. They also have to struggle hard against fear. Analyze your fear, and give an antidote to such a condition by placing yourself in

closer contact with the divine Source. That is the only remedy. If you are afraid to die, put your soul in close contact with God. Know that your soul is a spark of God which cannot be extinguished by the cold breath of death. If you do that, there will be no reason to be afraid of death or of anything else. I have seen people who, as a result of their close contact with that Source within, could threaten death. I have seen that. I have told you before about the great Swami Turiyananda, one of the direct disciples of Ramakrishna. He had completely conquered fear. Death was no death for him. The secret of how he and other great disciples of Ramakrishna attained to that state of fearlessness regarding this phenomenon of phenomena, death, which most of us are so afraid of, is that they had raised their own level of consciousness to the level of God.

The more you keep a close contact with the divine Source, God, the less you are afraid of losing externals like relatives, money, property, youth, in fact this life itself. And thereby you remain calm and tranquil and enjoy life as it comes to you. If you are obsessed by fear and think you can enjoy your youth, your family, and your prosperity, I must tell you that that kind of enjoyment is very brittle; it is apt to break at any moment. It is not at all permanent; it is not abiding.

So, constantly, in and through all our relations with the world, we have to keep ourselves close to that divine Source within in order to conquer fear. Unless you see God in your relations, they are so many sources of fear. As soon as you discover Him, even faintly, behind them, more peace, harmony, and poise are brought into your life. If you consider your money, which governs your prosperity, comfort, and the means for the fulfillment of desires, as something alienated from God, you will be afraid. A subtle fear will remain

hidden in your consciousness. However, if you consider it as belonging to God, and that you are holding it on his behalf, you will not be afraid of its being taken away from you. God will then be much more important to you than the money. The same may be said regarding every item of your experience in the external world. We must establish a close contact with God.

IT HAS BEEN declared in the philosophy of the Upanishads that the one cause of suffering is ignorance. Ignorance is that which makes you forget divinity, God, and that ignorance spreads itself in the form of many other disturbances. Fear is the first-born of ignorance. When you are ignorant of the Truth, fear seizes you by the neck, making life miserable for you. We must not forget that fear is the result of our forgetfulness of God. Fear creates many apparitions. It creates, fundamentally, the apparition that we call our ego-consciousness. That is nothing but an apparition. There is no reality in what we call our own self; the reality is God. It is ignorance which begets fear, and that fear has presented before us this false notion of the "I am" consciousness. There are so many elements of fear stored in the "I am" consciousness; and the feeling that "I am mortal, I have to die," is the most subtle of these. If you stand alone and say: "I am a man (or a woman), I am rich, I am poor, I am beautiful, or I am homely," and so on, you are in danger of being attacked by fear. If you stand alone in the "I am" consciousness, you are in constant danger.

If you want to avoid that danger, you must establish a definite relationship of your "I am" consciousness with God. After the words, I am, use a phrase that will connect you with God. Say, "I am the child, the servant, the friend, the wor-

shiper of God," and so on. Have something behind your "I am" consciousness and you are safe. Remember if you stand alone you are in constant danger. If everything else in this world fails you, and sooner or later it will, that one thing will never fail you. No matter what happens, this relationship with God will never fail you. Do not think that your relatives, your money and other possessions, will give you lasting happiness. Depend upon God.

Again, by depending upon God I do not mean we should hate everything else. Hatred is worse than attachment; it creates more disturbances in the mind than attachment does. Depend upon God, fundamentally and essentially, and see him present in everything. Think that your relationships are gifts from God; your wealth has been given to you by God, and so on. A friend gives a flower. It is not the flower that matters, it is the love with which he gives it. The flower is gone in a day or two, but the love remains. We should look upon our relationships and possessions as tokens of God's love for us. Thus, life is freed from attachment, freed from fear and from hatred, and when these have been completely removed, our consciousness attains to a state of tranquillity and poise. It is then that God is revealed in the consciousness of man.

I HAVE often given you the beautiful illustration of a still, calm lake on which the full moon is reflected. If the water of the lake is in a constant turmoil, if the surface is covered with waves, ripples, froth and foam, you will not be able to see the clear reflection of the moon. What will you do? Will you pray to the moon to show himself to you? Your prayers and supplications would be of no avail. The moon would say: "I am always here. Why do you not keep the

surface of the lake smooth and unruffled?" The lake is your consciousness. If you keep it in a state of turmoil and agitation and pray to the divinity to be reflected there, the reply will be: "I am constantly reflecting myself on the lake of your consciousness, but you have done nothing to keep it in a quiet, calm, and tranquil state. So how can you expect to see me there?" God is already within us. We do not have to pray to get a vision of him. I do not mean to say that there is no benefit in prayer. That is a different matter. Just now I am emphasizing another, a most important item, which we usually neglect. That is, the necessity of establishing peace and poise in our consciousness. If you make that the aim of your endeavors, and if you consider your success in life by the amount, the degree, of tranquillity you have been able to establish, it will not be so very difficult to enjoy the reflection of divinity in your life.

So a life that is lived, fundamentally, with the aim of attaining God-consciousness, reaches a state of peace and bliss. If we neglect that aim and consider phenomena as our God and our senses as priests, it will not be possible to enjoy lasting peace, real poise, or perfect tranquillity. If we are at the stage where we can appreciate this, we may consider ourselves very fortunate. However, we should not adopt a critical attitude towards those who do not do so. Everyone must follow his own karma. If you preach this doctrine to the general mass of people you will be laughed at, I am sure. By experience only, man comes to understand these things. You will find millions and millions of people who do not know these words, "peace" and "poise." The word "contented" does not form a part of their vocabulary. (Well, perhaps they have heard of Carnation Milk, "from contented cows," as their advertising slogan says, but that is almost the extent of the meaning of the word for them!) But, I repeat,

we should not criticize anyone. To such a man I would say, "My friend, if you think that your relations, your money and other possessions will bring you happiness, go ahead, experience them, enjoy them, and find out what they really bring. Eventually, you will come to the understanding that what you are seeking cannot be had from them. Then you will turn within."

To the man who has gained some appreciation of the goal, I would say, "Brother, if you really want lasting peace in your life, establish your connection with God. Feel that it is God who is the inspirer of your thoughts, that it is God whom you are contacting in the external world, and fill yourself completely with his consciousness. If you do not yet aspire to attain to the level of the Source, if you still want to enjoy a little tumult, go on and enjoy it, but know that it is just an appearance of your God. Associate everything, everything with your God. Then, even through your enjoyments of life you will stay in close contact with him."

However, some day you will stop and say: "Now I want only God, God without any attributes, without any limitation. I want to remain absorbed in That; I do not want a separate ego from my God. I want that state of infinite poise, infinite bliss, and infinite perfection." You may not be ready for that just now, but it is bound to come. If, even now, while you are enjoying a certain amount of fulfillment from the external world you have the conviction that your inner being, the one who is deriving this happiness, is God, that enjoyment becomes healthy enjoyment, becomes freed from attachment. There is no fear, no attachment, for the objects of enjoyment, and for that reason there is a greater degree of happiness. There is more peace and poise in your consciousness. The more we raise the level of our consciousness towards God, the more poise we will feel.

The consciousness of man and God must meet. There is no other way. Life attains its final and complete fulfillment when the two levels become one, when the "I" merges into God, and when God alone exists, without any attributes, without any form, without any limitation whatsoever. That is infinite bliss. That is the culmination of peace and poise, and that we may call absolute perfection.

WHAT VEDANTA MEANS TO ME

ANN L. THOMPSON

IN ORDER to effectively relate what Vedanta means to me I shall have to describe the path by which I was drawn to it. In so doing, I may give the impression that whatever occurred was brought about by my own efforts. But as I look back on the network of events leading me to the present I am convinced that there is a karmic tendency, an impulse which rules endeavor and colors our existence with a constant, intriguing pull between the subtle qualities of mind and soul. It is my only purpose to convey that struggle, and to indicate the predisposed factors which I feel combine with the grace of God to form a path.

WHEN I was seven years old I came to a conclusion about life that has ever since shaped my tendencies. I was lying in bed one night, staring into the dark, and suddenly I told myself the only certainty in this world, the only fact I could be absolutely sure of, was the fact that some day, sooner or later, I must die, and everyone and everything I loved must change or die. It frightened me; but I was compelled to face it, and to seek a compensation for it, an identification or unity with something of an enduring quality, for above all else I possessed a deep craving for the unchangeable. And a search began.

The first outward indication of my search was a disdain

toward "material things" which I defined in accordance with how much or how little an element of mind and spirit existed therein. Of course "mind and spirit" were still somewhat nebulous terms. I had an idea that they were in opposition to the material and that they did have more of a permanent quality about them. Such objects as cars, clothes, furniture, etc., were apparently of a most unenduring substance and so the worship of, the frantic attainment of, such objects was to me a stupid waste of time. In the realm of human behavior I observed and decided that large parties, in which people milled aimlessly about in a cloud of smoke; drinking, which seemed to transform the characters of people; and other such remarkable definitions of "fun" which involved a lack of emphasis upon the more thoughtful aspects of human existence were disgusting and intolerable. As a child, I was unable to formulate my attitudes and externally I seemed to be an odd bundle of protests, mentally "off-in-the-clouds." Variously I would refer to my search for the immutable as "a dream" (in the sense of an ideal) or "a destiny" (in the sense of a fated course), and for years no one would understand what I was talking about. It is not surprising that I found myself rather isolated from the majority, but I was often blessed by the presence of certain relatives, teachers, and friends who saw fit to encourage my "peculiarities," and who helped me retain a strong feeling of tenderness toward people in general.

Meanwhile, during my earliest years, on a ranch in Southern California, I had established a rapport with animals, including the wild ones, and now (on the North Shore of Chicago) I turned to the study of zoology and determined to make it my life's work. It was during that study I began my acquaintance with India. Few other places on earth contained such an attractive variety of fauna, but those competing areas (the Amazon Region, Africa, Malaysia) somehow failed to

captivate me the same way that India did. You might say I was able to perceive and study the other areas; but I was able to *feel* India. The reason is debatable and unimportant. The fact remains that a small girl in a proper Midwest atmosphere was essentially alienated from her social environment and very much in love with a place she had no apparent affinity with.

Thus, I often tried to find spots where it was peaceful, away from the overly-active group of thrill seekers. I had one friend who was similarly inclined, and it was with her that I discovered, at the age of ten, my favorite childhood refuge: "The Asiatic Temple." We had been to a movie matinee and emerged from the theater to see that fog had rolled in from Lake Michigan, the land burdened with its shroud. Intrigued by the mysterious atmosphere, we decided to investigate the nearest beach. This was a part of the shoreline we were unfamiliar with. The beach was about thirty-five steps below the street level. We stood looking down in its clouded direction when gradually the fog separated and, to our amazement, we saw what appeared to be some kind of exotic structure in a state of ancient decay, its wide stone steps lapped by gentle waves of the lake. "It's a temple!" we decided. "An Asiatic Temple!" We walked down to the sands, up the stairs of our "temple" and seated ourselves on its balcony. I was moved with a tremendous joy and gratitude. Here I could indulge in my unreasonable longing and love for a land I had not seen—India—and be often alone, save for the quiet marvel of friendship. Here I could pursue my odd paradise of dreams without being ridiculed. After school and on weekends, whenever time paid us favor, we bicycled to that spot and, resting on the balcony or wide stone steps, in fog or sun, even in rain; looking out on calm or turbulent lake, wind-swept days, snow-filled, sand-blown—it always seemed a bit of heaven.

I DO NOT believe that the way we fill our days in childhood is "just kids' stuff." Indeed, this tangible and acute period with its mental imagery can urge us, against the tide, to seek what we crave, what we are intuitively stumbling toward. Our "temple," which was in truth the half-wrecked remains of a country club of the 1920's, was for me a chance to nurture an emotional identity with the future. Little did I suspect, even in my most active imaginings, that the land of India and the good people I would some day meet from it, also contained the prime concern of my life. But no barrier would ever exist between us.

However, in the study of zoology barriers were rising fast. No one had to convince me that various forms of being, from trees and flowers, to butterflies and birds, to snakes and bears were closely akin to man in some marvelous and beautiful fashion. A number of times, amid natural surroundings, I had experienced flights of exalted wonder that reduced me to tears of confusion and desire for I knew not what. It was the sort of unity that only a profound love can give, and yet it was distinctly not an end but a beginning. There seemed to me a fabric of natural existence in which I was integrally woven, no matter how else it appeared outwardly. My "reverence for life" was fast destroying me as a scientist, for by the time I entered more advanced biology and was instructed to regard animals "objectively" I decided that no amount of interest on my behalf could condone using the lives of fellow creatures for the sake of acquiring knowledge.

This also brought me to terms with my religion, Roman Catholicism. Upon inquiry, I was told that God created animals for the benefit of man. I considered that egotistical outlook beyond acceptance. I wondered if other Catholic views were equally objectionable to me, and began to look into the philosophical bases for the miscellaneous doctrines of The

Faith. It was the first occasion on which I questioned The Church. I had gone to Catholic school for eight years of my life and had absorbed in a largely undedicated fashion the necessary lessons. Catholics are frequently discouraged about questioning, and so when I actually applied myself to religious problems I was appalled by the various creeds and dogmas I had previously accepted. I found the One True Church idea, the eternal heaven or hell, God the Father as the final Godhead, the explanation for good and evil—all unreasonable. I regarded The Church with disdain, and though I still paid homage to Jesus Christ, I was critical of the outcome of his teachings in Catholicism, and attained no comfort in a perusal of other Christian churches. Most important, I sensed a firm lack of emphasis upon the mystic approach, and although it took me some time to fully realize this fact, it was the mystic in my nature which emphatically rejected the unfortunate stress upon dogma and doctrine in the majority of Christian faiths.

Between the loss of an intended profession and the loss of a religion I was quite certain (at the age of fifteen) that life was more a burden than an opportunity. But I decided to try to make the best of it, for I did have something to fall back on: the arts, mainly music and literature. Ever since I was a small child I had shown talent in both of these, talent which was encouraged by instructors who told me I *could* be a musician and writer *if* I would only show the same amount of interest in these pursuits as I had heretofore shown in natural history. So, finally aroused, I dove headlong into artistic studies. In college I divided my attention between music and writing for a period of six years. My original plan was to be a naturalist writer, thus utilizing interest in biology and serving conservationist goals. But I found little or no opportunity to remain in the country areas I loved, and grad-

ually, despite myself, I began to convey, with words, the tortured responses to city life, my enforced alienation from those glimpses of indefinable rapture I had often experienced in the vicinity of nature. It seemed that I was moving every day farther from that which gave meaning to existence.

Soon I suffered with the knowledge of how empty things were, and there came dark periods when I seemed to be fighting my way through an endless obscurity. I had moments of such overpowering despair I would be rendered immobile with apathy and finally moved only by anger or fear to weave romantic patterns from the comforting phrases of older people about me: "You need to find the right man"; "You need a measure of success in your work—encouragement, that's all"; "Some day this pain could produce a great work of art!"

Thus, by my early twenties I had become "the embittered young artist," spending hours discussing the significance of music and poetry, reaching toward life with a groping intensity. I was overwhelmed by the hypocrisy of our social order and cultivated a cynical attitude toward every form of authority. Along with my companions I claimed that life, in order to be expressed, must be fully experienced. We worshiped intellectual sophistication and glorified love, the peak of human emotion. Still, amid this worldly and discontented atmosphere, I never forgot my search, and art, touching upon the spirit and creating tangible beauty of profoundly intangible elements of being, nonetheless gave me no satisfied feeling that I was near to the unchangeable content I sought. Art, great art, did endure in a way, but I was inclined to think it was essentially not a reason but another attempt to secure that reason. Yet I clung to it tenaciously, for I had nothing else in which to believe, and I was frightened by the wide gap of longing within me. I read philosophy but discovered no hint

of what I needed most, and Romanticism held sway. I was bitterly and coldly intellectual outside, insecure and lost within. Then a remarkable event occurred which was to mark the beginning of an even greater struggle. I met a Vedantist.

ODDLY enough it was my old friend of the Asiatic Temple days who was responsible for the introduction. She invited me to her crowded little apartment on the Near North Side of Chicago, where a group of earnest college students gathered. A discussion of religion began and we argued with enthusiasm. Since none of us had anything but respect for one another and sincere interest in the subject at hand, it was both pleasant and challenging. The majority were Roman Catholics. There were two agnostics (including myself), one Protestant, and one young man who did not state the name of his philosophy but who seemed unusually sympathetic toward all, agreeing with everyone and no one! He gradually began to elucidate ideas of existence which commanded our attention. I, in particular, was so impressed I could not entirely comprehend the almost unbelievable sense of exhilaration at the sound of his words. Later, I asked who this fellow was exactly. He turned out to be a next-door neighbor of my friend, who told me he was "according to the grapevine, a Vedanta (Hindu) disciple of a Swami Vishwananda." Hindu! . . . India! . . . My old love, India! But in the previous obsession with her animals, the exotic flavor of her sights and sounds, it had never occurred to me to investigate her dominant religion. After all, everyone knew that Hinduism was sacred cows, and multiple-figured deities and mysterious yoga powers, etc. Colorful, but hardly to be taken seriously in our more educated part of the world! Yet now I had come upon the word "Vedanta" and a young man who was as logical a person as I had ever met.

I saw him twice after that, very briefly. He impressed me as being happy, warm but aloof, and, especially, good.

I began a philosophical investigation, and the initial conflict emerged. Although basically unhappy I was intensely devoted to the arts, if only because it was more than apparent that this should be my way of life, professionally. The very atmosphere I had once ignored—the atmosphere of competitive city life with its concert halls and conservatories and literary groups—spelled the motivating force, and I was told that the more chaotic and involved the emotions of the writer-musician, the better she expressed herself. Much to my disappointment, when it came to the application of Vedanta philosophy, I realized that it and my attitude as a struggling artist were in direct opposition. How could I ever focus within, toward the ideal of Reality, essentially unattached to the world, and still be a functioning writer and musician? Impossible! At this point I observed an imperative choice between two roads: 1) continue to embrace the deeply involved way of life that art seemed to demand; 2) seek for a teacher of Vedanta. My instructors and friends were art-worshipers, Romanticists, and it was where I appeared to belong, miserable or not. To settle the argument, I had fallen in love with a man of the "romantic artist" category. Chained by emotions, I continued to read Vedanta books, and knew with an increasing conviction that this was the explanation I had sought for. Often I imagined myself torn in half, until, finally, Vedanta's new attraction lay, decimated, before the overpowering adoration I gave to the man I loved. Perhaps, I sadly thought, Vedanta had come too late for me; in order to love without dissension, there remained no alternative but to continue as an agnostic.

I had made my choice. Tragic as it was then, but fortunate as I see it now, I learned from this period, and the man

who was the center of it, and my brief embrace of mankind's commonly pursued romantic goals, the worst kind of agony and deceit a human relationship is capable of bestowing. It sent me to a depth of despair in which I could no longer function as writer or musician and in which I believed that death would be not terrible but the best possible result.

I moved from Chicago to New York, found no solace in the change of environment; then returned to my native California. Still I could not conquer the love or its outcome. I thought of Vedanta but nurtured a deep sense of shame in having rejected it before. I felt I had no right to pursue it in desperation. I held that it was cowardly and hypocritical to turn to religion just because there was nowhere else to turn. Religion should be a positive step, born of faithful admiration. And so with this ridiculous and stubborn ideal preventing me from taking the right step, I turned to an accepted form of help, psychoanalysis, and spent two and a half years paying doctor bills while working in an office, having given up all artistic endeavor. Analysis enabled me to overcome turbulent emotions, but left me with an even greater sense of the aimless movement of life. It had one salutary effect: the idea that if the function of living remained unsatisfying, such inner defeat grew out of my own twisted perception and appraisal, not out of any external conditions. This thought, at least, pointed me in the right direction. I began by asking myself, how shall I best realize my potential? And what is that potential? I had not practiced music for three years; by necessity I was still removed from nature; and when I tried to write "creatively" I was confronted with the question, "Is there anything worth writing about?" Obviously my work potential left something to be desired and was dependent on another source of meaning. Furthermore, I was terribly angry with "my dream"—that still positive yearning for a beauty and love that did not

gradually melt away despite frantic attempts toward preservation. It was a stupid, idealistic lie, I told myself . . . . Or was it?

I needed belief, more so than ever before: this I could not deny. Fortunately, I had retained a copy of the Bhagavad-Gita. One morning I took the book off the shelf, flipped open to a page at random and these words appeared: "There in the ignorant heart where I dwell, by the grace of my mercy / I am knowledge, that brilliant lamp, dispelling its darkness." It resounded throughout every fiber of my being. I broke into tears, asking God to please show me the way. It was the first time I had spoken to God in many years.

WITHIN a short time I was reading every Vedanta book I could secure: absorbing, arguing, and challenging each idea presented, with a critical and unbelieving attitude. Vedanta always won. With a mere book about it in my hand I had the strangest sensation of relief, of emerging from some hideous dungeon into the pure air of light and freedom. I then started attending classes and lectures at the Vedanta Temple in Hollywood. Swami Prabhavananda and Swami Vandananda were more convincing than all the books combined and I began to fully realize why the importance of the teacher had always impressed me.

Ever since the early days of my search, the word "teacher" created an effect of reverence in my heart. I did not understand it, but when I approached teachers in school, and private teachers of art, I did so with the vivid idea that they (or whichever one happened to predominate at the moment) should hand me the key to knowledge, the way to indisputable meaning. I think my struggle intrigued them for they, one by one, responded with affection and concern, but were finally defeated by my requests. I do not for a moment doubt that

this tendency had a purpose, and when Swami Prabhavananda had said approximately ten words for the first time in my hearing, I knew quite beyond reason that at last my questions would be answered.

So I continued to inquire, and though a part of my disposition constantly rebelled, Vedanta continued to draw me closer. I had given up music altogether but resumed writing, and I still had doubts about art in relation to Vedanta. How could I possibly become enveloped in the activities of various misguided characters of my own making when I was dedicated to thinking of God alone? One might ask what the awful conflict was about; certainly art and Vedanta are not enemies, and one could believe in Vedanta, following it to the point where it did not interfere with a necessary way of living. I think that is entirely possible with some; but I also anticipated, correctly, that this philosophy would become for me a surrender—that there could be no "halfway" assimilation and at the same time contentment. If I called myself a Vedantist it would have to be wholeheartedly, fervently dedicated to its principles and its goal. I would have to reshape my attitude toward artistic achievement.

At first a gradual "meeting ground" voiced itself, aided by Swami Vivekananda's *Karma Yoga* and inspired with a goal pronounced by Tagore in his essay *The Religion of An Artist*: "It is for the artist to proclaim his faith in the everlasting Yes,—to say: 'I believe there is an ideal hovering over and permeating the earth, an ideal of that paradise which is not the mere outcome of fancy, but the ultimate Reality in which all things dwell and move.' " It finally occurred to me that if I worked for the sake of the work, offering its fruits to the Lord in accordance with Karma yoga; and tried, in accordance with Tagore's idea, to relate something of value, I would be on the right path.

This enabled me to move forward. But many of the problems we worry about and try to resolve before we make religion the center of our lives, best resolve themselves as the religious way unfolds within the mind and heart. What I anticipated proved to be only partially valid. What I worked so hard to prepare myself for was largely unnecessary. The writer bows in reverent and willing submission to the Hindu disciple, and no dangerous conflict arises. The best of our knowledge rests in the fact that peace of mind comes when we even try to resign ourselves to the will of God. The mere attempt is a reassurance.

But the most acute and inexplicable alteration was ahead. I called myself a "philosophical Hindu" and no one was going to convince me that ritual was anything but repulsive. (It undoubtedly recalled the childhood religion against which I had revolted.) As a member of the Vedanta Society I avoided the *pujas* (worships) and shuddered at the idea of such exalted philosophy being "reduced to such devotional nonsense." Then, through no attempt on my part, in fact much to my surprise, I began to feel overwhelmingly drawn to the words, the picture of, the thought of a holy man who had previously struck me as quite peculiar: Ramakrishna. In truth, I was aware of the beginning of a love, and soon that love, defeating intellectual protests, demanded expression and made me bow before the temple shrine. I do not know how to explain the sensation I had, immediately, of everything falling into place. I was no longer in conflict with myself. A neat pattern of devotion-intellect-work was forming. I began to observe the worship, entranced by its symbolism, and I realized that it was not ritual I disliked but only the ritual I had been obliged to attend while emotionally aloof. This Hindu ritual had meaning, because it gave expression to what I felt.

Yet, as time passed, more doubts were born. (I think reli-

gion specializes in uncalculated jolts, each one producing a type of resignation that gives additional strength.) Ramakrishna had captivated my heart to a degree beyond understanding. This yearning, I believed, must come after years of struggle to attain it, and I did not deserve such. I wondered, therefore, about the value of my feelings, until gradually the intrinsic qualities of religion were both logical and apparent, for I remembered that I had been seeking it since that night when I was seven years old. The emotion was not sudden. I merely awakened a little by the strength of God's most recent Divine Incarnation reaching out and touching the soul. When, through his grace, I beheld a faint glimmer of what this love contained, I knew with the greatest joy and hope I had ever experienced, that my search had not been in vain. And, in the inevitable trials and tribulations of spiritual endeavor, the temporary dark moments of anguish, I cannot forget the occasional glimpses of light that promise me an answer to what I have longed for since early youth.

I BELIEVE every search toward Vedanta is a search for truth-beauty-goodness, for perfect love, for the Reality that exceeds human circumstance. This is what "my dream" had spelled in no uncertain terms for me at the age of seven. It was an image in the perceptive mind of childhood knowledge: the birthright of realization. I have asked myself many times why the discriminative faculty did not hold and direct me, unwavering, along the correct path, and the only answer that seems at all reasonable is that intellectual acumen is not the key to the motivated personality. The emotional drives and goals are the true directional signals, and emotionally I was driven toward nature and music and literature rather than religious symbols. This may have been due to the fact that religion

in my immediate family was reduced to an aimless function, a prescribed emptiness. The Catholic faith gave no applicable directions for spiritual unfoldment; I was by nature a mystic and the church ignored the mystical way. But it was karma that placed me in a less advantageous environment than my disposition might have indicated. And there is no quarrel with karma! Through the grace of God, perception did not entirely fail, and every disappointment that drove me closer to Vedanta and the Lord was born of comparative analysis: nothing appeared quite worthwhile with a dream of the immutable hovering in this mind constantly. If I had made mistakes they too were for a purpose: some lesson unforgettably taught, or a youthful rebellion quenched. And God, in his infinite mercy, had been with me the while, observing, as he must with each of us, that I was his from the very start. Once when confronted with two paths I had taken the wrong one. I thanked the Lord that with pain and inner chaos my choice had been clearly designated wrong, and that now I had a chance to take the right one. I asked Swami Prabhavananda for help, which he bestowed with an attitude of gentle strength and affectionate regard. My intuition was correct: questions are being answered with remarkable thoroughness.

And so the struggle continues, but of a different substance: clear, contained, exemplified, with a goal that is not only truth, beauty, and goodness, but unchanging, indescribably an end in itself. I have found, essentially, a great joy, born of the grace of God, portrayed in the guru, resounding in the mantra, felt with each ray of love blossoming where in my own singular helplessness the Lord alone gives it light—all combined to form an enduring quality that unites and fills the soul with freedom. This is what Vedanta means to me.

THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

BHASKALIN, a spiritual aspirant, went to Bhadva, the preceptor, and asked: "Revered Sir, teach me Brahman." The teacher did not answer. The disciple repeated his question, but the teacher remained silent. However, when questioned for a third time, Bhadva said: "I have already answered thy question. Silent is that Atman."

Shankara, the great saint and advaitic philosopher of the eighth century, narrates this incident from an Upanishad in his commentary on the Brahma Sutras or the Vedanta aphorisms. A similar parable is ascribed to Buddha. What is the significance of such stories? Vedanta insists that in the ultimate analysis, the Truth is indescribable, beyond words or thought. "Wherefrom words, along with the mind, turn back"—thus the Taittiriya Upanishad indicates the Ultimate Reality. The Kena Upanishad asserts: "The eye cannot approach It, neither speech, nor mind. It is different from what is known, and It is beyond what is unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancients who instructed us regarding It." The Upanishad adds further that he who thinks he has known It, does not know, while he who thinks he does not know, knows. Thus, according to the Vedanta, the Ultimate Truth is not within the grasp of the intellect or sense perception; it is supersensuous.

Now, if the Vedantic goal is the realization of this Absolute Truth which is beyond the reach of the senses or the

intellect, how are we to know It? Or is It knowable at all? What are the spiritual practices enjoined by Vedanta for the realization of this Truth? And what do these practices actually help us to accomplish? These are some of the questions we shall attempt to answer in the course of this paper.

That this Truth has been realized by various saints and sages in the long course of history, not only in India, but in other countries, too, is a recognized fact. The vast metaphysical edifice of Vedanta has been built upon the direct experience—immediate and intrinsic—of these great souls. Vedanta designates that the last court of appeal for proving the truth is not dialectics, but direct experience—*anubhava*. It is on this account that Vedanta considers the testimony of the Upanishads as the strongest proof. In the West, too, the realization of great mystics like Plotinus and Eckhart is in accord with that mentioned in the Upanishads. Other Christian mystics also come very near to advaitic experience, as testified by their declarations. In graphic language, the Bhagavad-Gita describes a man of realization, one who has steadied his consciousness: he has conquered all desires; he does not have to seek enjoyment outside; his mind is undisturbed by pleasure or pain; his love embraces everything, while he himself remains unmoved as a rock is in bad or good weather; he no longer has any egoism and desires, and even if they enter into him, he remains undisturbed, as the ocean remains undisturbed by the waters which flow into it. This kind of realization, though very difficult to attain, is the highest goal of human life. Even on pragmatic grounds, a religion which seeks this goal can be justified. As Swami Vivekananda declares: "In building character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to one's self, religion is the highest motive power, and therefore ought to be studied from that standpoint."

To realize this goal, Vedanta prescribes a threefold discipline: hearing, reflection, and meditation—*shravana*, *manana*, and *nidhidhyasana* as the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes it. Hearing means the hearing of the great Vedantic dicta such as "Thou art That," "Consciousness is Brahman," "This Atman is Brahman," and "I am Brahman." The purport of all Vedanta is to teach this ultimate unity of the Supreme Self and the individual self—that the *jiva* is no other than Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna used to narrate the story of the salt doll which went to measure the depths of the ocean and never returned to tell its story! Similar is our little self which, in its attempt to scale the depths of the Absolute gets merged in it. The Upanishads say that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. The Christian mystics, too, are in accord on this point. Witness what Ruysbroeck says: "All men who are exalted above their creatureliness into a contemplative life are within this Divine glory—yea, are that glory, and they see and feel and find in themselves by means of this Divine light that they are the same ground as to their uncreated nature." Eckhart is clearer in his declaration: "If therefore I am changed into God and He makes me one with Himself, then, by the living God, there is no distinction between us . . . . God and I: we are one. By knowing God, I take Him to myself. By loving God, I penetrate Him." Thus we find that the Vedanta preaches a religion where the mystic realization is the Essence, and regarding this Essence the mystics of all religions speak in similar language.

But the Vedanta reasons out that the *talk* of getting merged—this becoming—can be only on the empirical plane. For, from the ultimate point of view, "there can be no origination or dissolution, no one bound or aspiring, no one seeking after liberation or liberated," as Gaudapada, the great teacher of Advaita puts it. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says that

"remaining Brahman, one attains It." How can one attain oneself? How can the Infinite ever become the finite, so as to necessitate great effort to regain Its infinity? It does not sound logical. Therefore, when we talk of attainment, it can be only in a figurative sense. What is actually aimed at in Vedantic *sadhana* (spiritual practice) is the removal of *avidya*—ignorance—which envelops the true nature of man, who is non-different from Brahman. The nature of this avidya is indescribable. The moment one is free from avidya one becomes aware of one's true nature in the transcendental state. Thus all our efforts, all our struggles are within the field of maya or avidya, this cosmic illusion. And Vedantic sadhana, too, is not outside maya, though sadhana is indispensable for liberation from the clutches of maya.

Therefore, the Vedantic dicta declaring the oneness of all existence have to be first heard. And, after having heard them, one has to reflect on them, then meditate on them. Through meditation one gains the transcendental vision and, with that, Brahman-knowledge.

But there is another school of Vedanta which considers hearing itself to be the cause of Brahman-knowledge. To illustrate its doctrine, a story is narrated: Ten men crossed a stream, and on reaching the opposite bank the leader counted them to see whether all had crossed over safely. But every time he counted he left out himself and so always found one short. This created confusion among the group. In the meanwhile, a wayfarer happened to come along, and observed the situation. He then pointed out that the leader himself was the tenth man, and the illusion of one less person was removed. Such is the case with the *jiva*, to whom the guru teaches his real nature, through the medium of the great sayings of the Upanishads quoted earlier. But the meaning this school of Vedanta attaches to the word "hearing" *(shravana)* is not the

usual one; for the world is here equated with the realization of Brahman *(Brahma-avagati)*. In fact, Shankara defines this word "hearing" as carrying the sense of "realization." Thus, in the ultimate analysis, a transcendental awareness of one's real nature—i.e. the unity with the absolute Brahman—is the cause of liberation according to Vedanta.

Now, one may ask, though we read and hear the great dicta of the Upanishads many a time, why do we not realize the Supreme Reality? The answer is that one must be fit, one must be fully prepared, one must have the capacity for transcendental awareness. How is that to be attained? For this purpose, one has to be a sincere aspirant, a seeker after liberation *(mumukshu)*. If there is no inner aspiration, no amount of yogic practices or intellectual gymnastics can help us reach the goal. The great religious truths, when imparted to unfit recipients, are like seeds sown on stony ground.

Swami Vivekananda describes the desire for liberation in a graphic manner: "When one realizes all this (worldly life) is slavery, then comes the desire to be free; an intense desire comes. If a piece of burning charcoal is placed on a man's head, see how he struggles to throw it off. Similar will be the struggles for freedom of a man who really understands that he is a slave of nature."

Again, mere aspiration without the requisite efforts and without the necessary qualifications serves no purpose. These qualifications are enumerated thus: 1. discrimination between the Eternal and transitory things; 2. dispassion for the enjoyment of sense-objects and their results; and 3. qualities such as internal calmness, self-control, self-withdrawal (from things external), fortitude, concentration, and faith. Let us discuss these briefly in serial order.

As long as a man considers the world around him to be real, it is impossible for him to seek God intensely. The one unchanging Reality exists behind this universe of flux. One has to be convinced of this fact and constantly discriminate that the world is impermanent, while its substratum, Brahman, is permanent. Thus alone an intense longing for realizing the Truth can arise. The Katha Upanishad declares: "He, the eternal among non-eternals, the intelligence in the intelligent, who, though one, fulfills the desires of many—those wise men who perceive Him within their own self, to them belongs eternal peace, and to none else." The world which is transient consists, when analyzed, only of name and form. Shankara asserts that the qualities of existence, luminosity (knowledge), and lovableness (bliss) belong to Brahman while the world consists of name and form. If the world is stripped of these two attributes it will slip through our fingers. The Chandogya Upanishad says that the clay alone is real, while forms, which are shaped out of it, are mere names.

There are two ways of discrimination: one of negation and another of assertion. In the path of negation, the things of the world are rejected as "not this, not this" (*neti, neti*) and Brahman is sought as the transcendental truth, while in the path of assertion the whole of existence is seen as one, as the manifestation of Brahman. Both these processes, the transcendent and immanent, are found in the Upanishads. The Svetasvatara Upanishad exclaims: "Thou art woman, Thou art man, Thou art the youth and the maiden, too. Thou art the old man tottering with his staff. Thou facest in all directions."

The capacity for discrimination can come about only if we are free from cravings for enjoyment, here and hereafter. No doubt, in the modern world, few bother themselves about the "hereafter," though all religions talk of heavens with

countless objects of enjoyment and unending pleasures. Modern man says: "Let me enjoy myself here, let me make the most of this life, let me have plenty of money, a beautiful wife and children, and so on. Why worry about another life?" All this would be fine if everyone could get what he seeks, and maintain it. But the fact is otherwise. Worldly enjoyment is a mirage which is never attained. As Swami Vivekananda poetically states: "Time, the avenger of everything, comes and nothing is left. He swallows up the saint and the sinner, the king and the peasant, the beautiful and the ugly; he leaves nothing. Everything is rushing towards that one goal—destruction . . . . We may try to cover our old and festering sores with a cloth of gold, but there comes a day when the cloth of gold is removed and the sore, in all its ugliness, is revealed." Such an analysis of the world need not lead to the conclusion that Vedanta is pessimistic; for it is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. Rather, it insists that there is no unmixed pleasure in this world.

Thus *vairagya* or dispassion comes only with the understanding that good and evil are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. And, having acquired such dispassion, one has to cultivate certain fundamental virtues, says the Vedanta. Perfect dispassion or perfect vairagya is the result of the perfect practice of six virtues or disciplines. Actually, they are interdependent. To attain perfection in each one of the disciplines is in itself a difficult task; it may be the work of a lifetime. But one need not get discouraged on that account; for it should be remembered that perfect renunciation and perfect selfishness can come only with God-realization. As the Bhagavata puts it: "Just as a man, in the process of eating, gains satisfaction, nourishment, and removal of hunger with every morsel, even so, devotion, God-realization and perfect renunciation come simultaneously." Again, Hindu belief encour-

ages spiritual effort by assuring us that no such effort is in vain; for we begin our next life from where we leave off the present; and this goes on till final realization of one's identity with Brahman is attained. Therefore, Sri Krishna assures Arjuna in the Gita: "My son, no doer of good ever comes to grief." However, an ardent aspirant has to be ever vigilant in the practice of the preliminary disciplines. Any neglect in this regard may verily spell doom. Shankara says that negligence may drag a man so far down that, like a ball rolling on a staircase, he cannot check his downward crash.

WE shall explain the six disciplines in brief:

1. *Internal Calmness* (*shama*) means controlling the mind and preventing it from externalizing. The nature of the mind is to remain always in a flux. It has to be brought under control by the constant practice of restraining outgoing thoughts. One of the ways to calm the mind is beautifully stated by the great yoga philosopher Patanjali: "Friendship, mercy, gladness, and indifference pacify the mind-stuff, if thought of in regard to others, who are happy, unhappy, good, or evil, respectively." This means that we will not be affected easily by others, if we can cultivate these attitudes of mind.

2. *Self-control* (*dama*) means the control of the sense organs. A man given to sense enjoyment can never dream of religion, let it be any religion.

3. *Self-withdrawal* (*uparati*) is the voluntary withdrawal of the senses from their objects. Swami Vivekananda describes this as the avoidance of thinking about sense-objects.

4. *Fortitude* (*titiksha*), as Swami Vivekananda says, is the most difficult of all these disciplines. Shankara defines it as the "bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them and at the same time being free from anxiety or lament

on their account." This is what Jesus calls the nonresistance of evil. What a difficult ideal! Still one has to try to practice it; for only by this means can one get rid of one's identification with the body, mind, and ego.

5. *Concentration* (*samadhana*) is the constant practice of the remembrance of God, or remembrance of our true nature which is Brahman.

6. *Faith* (*shraddha*) is the firm belief in the truth of the scriptural teachings and the teachings of the guru or master. In fact, no activity, no progress is possible in this world without faith, what to talk of religion! If I do not believe fully in a higher life, why should I vex myself to attain it? And we should remember that our efforts are in proportion to our faith. Sister Nivedita mentions in *The Master As I Saw Him* the incident where a youth, who used to learn the Upanishads from Swami Abhedananda, asked one day, "Sir, is this all true?" The Swami replied, "Surely, my boy." And the very next day the young man was a lonely pilgrim on his way to the Himalayas, with only a loincloth as his apparel. He had set his mind, once and for all, on the realization of the ideal. Indeed, a tremendous faith of that kind alone can bring us to the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Vedanta considers that only a person with a fair amount of success in these six disciplines can reap the benefit of hearing the great Upanishadic dicta and reflecting and meditating on them. ॥

GOPAL'S MOTHER

PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA

In Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar, Narendranath one day met Gopal's Mother. Narendranath was then in his early twenties. He believed in the formless aspect of God and he hoped to achieve the highest realization by knowledge of the Divine. He not only had a dislike for image worship; he openly challenged even Sri Ramakrishna's visions and experiences and wanted to put them to the most rigorous tests of reason. Gopal's Mother, on the other hand, who was then over sixty, had attained, through simple devotion and faith, a vision of God in the form of Gopal, the Child Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna introduced these two to each other and then asked Gopal's Mother to narrate her experiences to Narendranath. He who believed in God in all aspects and accepted all paths as true found it great fun to bring believers of different views together. So, at his request, Gopal's Mother began her narration. As she spoke, remembering how Gopal had lived with her just like her own child, she relived that experience of joy, and tears flowed down her wrinkled cheeks. As she finished she said to Narendranath in a choked voice: "My child, you are learned and intelligent; I am a poor miserable person. I know nothing, understand nothing; please say if all this is mere imagination or real." His whole being filled with an intense love for God, Narendranath replied, "No, mother, what you have described seems to be all true."

Sri Ramakrishna called her Gopaler Ma or Gopal's Mother because her chosen ideal of God was Gopal. During

her whole life she had practiced that type of devotion which is called *vatsalyarati*, a longing for God in which the devotee looks upon God as a young child. This is considered one of the highest kinds of devotion because it cannot be developed as long as there remains in the mind the slightest consciousness of the powers of God. It is not often practiced, for how many would dare to strip God of all his glories and regard him as a child waiting helplessly to be nursed and looked after? Moreover, here the attitude of the devotee is one of giving to God and not of receiving anything from him. Who demands anything from a child?

The most common image of Gopal is that of the Child Krishna, less than one year of age, crawling on hands and knees, with the right hand raised in the gesture of asking for something, his face turned upwards as if gazing wistfully at someone. Aghoramani Devi—that was the given name of Gopal's Mother—who had none in the world to call her own, naturally and single-mindedly adopted this form of spiritual contemplation, and Gopal became the center of her life.

Even today, in the southern corner of the garden attached to the Radha-Krishna temple at Kamarhatty, stands a hut used as the women's apartment. There, in a small room with three windows opening towards the south and commanding a full view of the holy Ganges, lived Aghoramani Devi. Widowed at a very young age, she never went to live with her husband's family, but stayed in her parental house. Her brother, Nilamadhava Bandyopadhyaya, was a priest in this Radha-Krishna temple.

A vast property at Kamarhatty belonged to one Govinda Chandra Datta of Calcutta. He was a broker for a famous European house. After an attack of paralysis he retired to his garden house at Kamarhatty and built there a temple of Radha-Krishna. The rest of his life was spent in devout wor-

ship in the temple, listening to discourses on the scriptures from learned men, and engaging in other pious activities such as feeding the poor. He had one son who predeceased him; his two daughters were married. After his death the greater part of his property was lost. Fearing that the service at the temple might suffer also, his widow, a virtuous and pious woman, stayed at Kamarhatty from time to time and looked after the management of the temple. She lived an austere life, observing religious vows, and spent most of her time in the temple.

It was at this time that the priest's sister, Aghoramani Devi, began frequenting the temple. Being of a similar nature and leading an equally strict religious life, she soon became friends with the mistress of the temple. The two spent their time joyfully in service to the deities. As her love for God increased, Aghoramani Devi, by permission of her friend, began to stay in one of the rooms of the women's apartment.

Here, hidden from the eyes of the world, in the solitude and quiet of her room, she began her hard spiritual practices. Her *sadhana* was *japa*—repeating the name of God. Japa is not a mechanical repetition of the name of God; contemplation on the Ideal the name represents is essential in this process of mental purification. Japa is very effective in the path of spiritual advancement for, as Patanjali, the authority on yoga, says, it helps to remove all mental and physical obstacles such as disease, mental laziness, lack of enthusiasm, false perception, clinging to sense-enjoyment, etc. Swami Vivekananda, in his commentary on the Yoga Aphorisms, states: "It is the greatest stimulus that can be given to the spiritual tendencies." The japa-sadhana that Gopal's Mother practiced shows that she apparently lived entirely within her own thought. Sceptics might say that her mind, which was shut in upon itself, naturally had hallucinations concerning the Ideal

she concentrated upon. But we see in her life how she attained the highest realization through this discipline. It opened in her mind a channel, through which the power behind the name she repeated manifested itself in form: her Chosen Ideal, the Child Gopal. But the vision was attained only after thirty years of austere practices.

We find a picture of her daily life recorded in the *Lilaprasanga* (translated into English as *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*), whose author, Swami Saradananda, knew her personally. She arose every morning at two and, after having her bath, she sat down for japa, which continued five or six hours at a stretch. Then she would go to the temple and perform whatever services were required of her. After the noonday worship at the temple she would return to her room, collecting firewood on the way, cook her meal, and rest for an hour or so. In the evening she again made japa which continued until a late hour in the night, broken only by the vesper services at the temple. Before retiring to bed she would take a cup of milk. Thus, for thirty long years, day in and day out, Aghoramani Devi continued her sadhana. Referring to this part of her life, Swami Vivekananda said to Sister Nivedita, after she had paid a visit to the saint of Kamarhatty, "Ah! This is the *old* India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away, never to return."

By 1884, the name of Sri Ramakrishna had become well known in Calcutta. Having heard about him, Aghoramani Devi and the mistress of the Radha-Krishna temple decided to pay him a visit at Dakshineswar. And so one cold December morning that year they went to Dakshineswar by boat. Sri Ramakrishna received them in his room. He was glad

to see the earnestness of these devoted souls, and gave them religious instructions. He sang a few devotional songs for them. When they took leave of him, he bade them come again. After they had left he remarked, "Ah! What an expression of devotion was on their faces. Their eyes were full of intense love for God. Even the sacred *tilak* on their foreheads looked wonderful."

The ladies, on their part, felt great respect for this holy man and they decided to visit him again. Engaged in various worldly duties the mistress of the temple, however, could not return to Dakshineswar. But, free as she was from worldly encumbrances, there was nothing to prevent Aghoramani Devi from visiting Sri Ramakrishna, so she journeyed back to Dakshineswar after only a few days. And thus began, during her sixtieth year, a new chapter in the life of this saint, which is as difficult to express in language as it is incomprehensible in spirit.

In keeping with tradition, she bought a few pice worth of sweetmeats before going to see the holy man, but as she was poor she could afford only the cheapest kind. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw her coming he cried out, "Oh! Here you are! What have you brought? Give it to me." She said later, "I shrank back, feeling ashamed of bringing out that worthless sweetmeat, knowing how so many people brought so many good things for him. Besides, that he should ask for it as soon as I came." But she could not say anything out of fear and shame and gave it to him. With great pleasure he started eating it, saying, "Why do you spend so much and bring sweets? Prepare cocoanut-balls yourself and bring one or two when you come. Or else, bring a little of whatever you cook for yourself. I wish to eat what you cook."

"Thus he went on talking only about eating," she related. "That day there was no talk about religion. I thought to

myself, 'I have indeed come to see a strange *sadhu* who talks only about eating. I am so miserably poor, how can I feed him? Very well, I shall not come here any more.' "

But as soon as she crossed the threshold to go home she felt as if someone was pulling her back, and she could proceed to Kamarhatty only with great difficulty. A few days later, the "Brahmani of Kamarhatty," as Sri Ramakrishna called her then, came to Dakshineswar again with some cooked food. On seeing her Ramakrishna, as before, at once asked for something to eat. Eating with great relish what she had brought with her, he said, "How delicious! It is like nectar indeed!" Tears rolled down the woman's cheeks, for she thought that he was praising her thus only because she was poor and could not afford to bring anything better.

Aghoramani's love and devotion for Sri Ramakrishna gradually brought about a change in her life. She who had not left the precincts of the Radha-Krishna temple for over three decades began frequenting the Dakshineswar temple. And on every visit she took Sri Ramakrishna something to eat, for she was sure he would ask for it. Her Gopal, she thought, had brought her to a wonderful holy man who, like Gopal himself, always demanded food! She complained to him once, "Gopal, is this the result of my devotion to you that you have brought me to a holy man who only wants to eat! I will go there no more." But some irresistible attraction always drew her back to him.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna once visited the Kamarhatty temple. He sang devotional songs there and the people were all moved to see his *bhava samadhi* (a state of ecstasy).

THEN, one day, there came to Aghoramani Devi the fulfillment of her devotions and austerities.

It was the spring of 1885. At three in the morning one day she was doing her japa as usual when she suddenly saw Sri Ramakrishna sitting near her on her left; his right hand was extended and clenched in a fist, a gesture just like Gopal's. She saw him very clearly—just as she used to see him at Dakshineswar. She thought to herself, "What is this? How did he come here at this odd hour?" To relate the story in her own words: "I saw Gopal (Sri Ramakrishna) smiling sweetly. As I took courage and caught hold of his left hand, he vanished, and lo! in his place I saw Gopal, a child of ten months—so big—(and she showed it with her hands) crawling on his knees, with one of his hands raised and looking at me. Ah! the beauty of it! And he said to me, 'Mother, give me butter.' Seeing and hearing this I felt faint, and cried aloud, so loudly did I cry out that had there been people staying around, they would have assembled there. Sobbing I said, 'My child, I am miserably poor. What shall I give you to eat? From where shall I get butter and milk for you, my child?' But did that wonder-child listen to me? He simply went on saying, 'Give me something to eat.' What could I do? I got up weeping and from a hanging basket brought down two dried cocoanut-balls and said, 'Gopal, my child, I am giving you this worthless thing to eat, but do not give me such food to eat.'

"I could not continue my japa that day. Gopal came and sat on my lap and snatched away the rosary. He rode on my shoulders and crawled all round the room. As soon as it was dawn I ran like a mad person to Dakshineswar. Gopal also went with me. I carried him in my arms and he rested his head on my shoulders and his rosy feet dangled on my breast."

Riding on the wave of esctatic joy and love, the "Brahmani of Kamarhatty" entered Sri Ramakrishna's room through the eastern door. She was not conscious of the outside

world. Her sari had fallen off her shoulders and was sweeping the floor. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes were turned upwards. She saw nothing but Sri Ramakrishna as he was sitting on his smaller bedstead facing the door, as though waiting for her. Without any explanation he understood her state of mind. When she came in and sat down on the floor in front of Sri Ramakrishna he entered into *bhava samadhi.* He got down from his bed and she fed him with the butter and milk she had brought with her. After some time, when his mind returned to the normal plane, he got up and sat on his bed again. But the ecstasy of Aghoramani did not end. She began to dance in the room, repeating "Brahma is dancing and Vishnu is dancing." Seeing her, Sri Ramakrishna said to another devotee who was present in the room, "See, she is completely filled with bliss. Her mind is in the world of Gopal, now."

Her ecstatic mood continued for a long time. Shedding profuse tears, she spoke about the divine vision: "Gopal is on my lap, there he enters your person (Sri Ramakrishna's) . . . there he comes out again, come my child, come to the lap of your poor mother." The pranks of Gopal persisted, and she was now convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was none else than her Gopal. She henceforth called him Gopal and she became "Gopal's Mother" in the real sense.

In order to lessen the intensity of her feelings Sri Ramakrishna made her eat something. Under the influence of her spiritual mood she continued to say, "Gopal, my child, your mother has spent her life in dire poverty. She earned her livelihood by selling sacred thread spun by her on the spindle. Is that the reason why you are taking so much care of her today?"

After spending the whole day at Dakshineswar she set out for Kamarhatty in the evening, Gopal going back with her.

A GREAT CHANGE came over Gopal's Mother, and she could no longer continue her old way of life. Her strict, orthodox practices and observances slowly relaxed. The reason for it was Gopal himself. He on whose name and form she had concentrated and contemplated all those years, was with her, throbbing with life and accepting her loving services—rather, not accepting but demanding! When she went to the garden to collect firewood, Gopal had to be taken with her; when she cooked, he looked on, waiting for her to feed him; when she slept, he had to be given a place next to her. One day he cried and cried for a pillow which the poor mother could not afford, and he was pacified only when she made him lay his head on her arm and promised to buy a pillow for him. Constantly looking after him thus, she spent two months. She had nothing more to strive for; yet by force of habit she sometimes tried to continue her japa. She did not realize that her sadhana was no longer necessary, until one day Sri Ramakrishna told her so: At Dakshineswar, after greeting Sri Ramakrishna, she sat in the *nahabat* counting her beads. When she finished and opened her eyes, she observed Sri Ramakrishna coming toward her. He said, "Why do you perform so much japa now? You have attained the highest."

"Shall I not perform japa then? Have I attained everything?" she asked.

"Yes, you have attained everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything."

"What do you say? Have I really attained everything?"

"Yes, everything. Performance of japa, practicing penance etc. for your own self are no longer necessary. But, if you like, you may do these things for the sake of this body (pointing to himself) so that it may keep well."

Thus assured, she said, "Then whatever I will do from

now on will be for you." And she threw her rosary, rosary-bag, etc. into the Ganges.

When her spiritual mood subsided after two months, Gopal's Mother complained to Sri Ramakrishna: "What have you done to Gopal? What fault have I committed? Why do I not have your vision (in the form of Gopal) now?" He consoled her by saying, "If in this *Kali yuga* one has such visions continuously, one's body does not last. It lasts for twenty-one days only and then falls off like a dry leaf." She accepted his words with full faith.

As her visions became less frequent, she visited Dakshineswar more often and gradually accepted Sri Ramakrishna's circle of devotees as her own. He wanted her to live long so that all, especially women, would see and know this embodiment of vatsalyarati. Whenever he met her he showed as much respect to her as one would show to one's own mother. "This case is filled with Hari only, this body consists of Hari alone," he would point out to his devotees.

DURING the Chariot Festival of Lord Jagannath in 1885, Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. He spoke to the devotees about the love-intoxicated experiences and visions of Gopal's Mother and asked them to send for her. His wish was complied with immediately; by evening she was brought to Calcutta. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in the parlor talking to the devotees when the carriage that brought her reached the gate. All of a sudden an infusion of Gopal's spirit entered into him and transported him into another world. His body assumed the posture of Gopal and he remained immersed in bhava samadhi. When Gopal's Mother entered the room she saw him in the form of her Chosen Ideal and she was overwhelmed. The devotees who

witnessed this showed great reverence toward her, knowing that the strength of her devotion had forced Sri Ramakrishna to assume the form of the Child Gopal. Sister Nivedita beautifully wrote, "The sainthood of Gopaler Ma is as great as that of Paramahamsa [Sri Ramakrishna]. For in her was such motherhood that the heart of Ramakrishna became a child to her."

After reaching the highest stage of dualistic realization the mind of Gopal's Mother gradually began to scale the heights of nondualistic realization, in which the nutshell of conditioned divinity is broken and the soul feels its essential oneness with the Universal Consciousness. The immediate cause of this realization was the withdrawal of Sri Ramakrishna from the world. As can be understood, his absence deeply grieved her. For days she locked herself up in her room at Kamarhatty, feeling distraught. She had visions of him later that greatly assuaged her grief. But her vision of the universe as God came some time later. It was at Mahesh, during the time of the Chariot Festival of Lord Jagannath. While the chariot moved she saw that the chariot and the thronging thousands, all were Gopal. Inebriated by intense love, she lost external consciousness. Later on, describing her mood, she said, "At that time I was not myself; I danced and laughed, created a second Kurukshetra."

From then on she started visiting the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, at Baranagore Math, and the monasteries at Alambazar and Belur. On such occasions the monks asked her to cook something that would be offered to Sri Ramakrishna. This she did, and solemnly offered it to him during worship. Sometimes she spent nights in the monastery, too; and without hesitation she mixed with Swami Vivekananda's foreign disciples.

She spent the last days of her life in Sister Nivedita's

house, where she went to stay in December of 1903. Having the saint in her house was, of course, a delight to Nivedita.

In Gopaler Ma's last illness her advaitic experience reached such heights that she saw Gopal within herself. When anything was given to her to eat she accepted it after offering it to Gopal or sometimes said, "Gopal, eat," and ate it herself, saying, "Gopal is in here."

She died on July 7, 1906, at the age of eighty. A glimpse of her life indicates within a humble form the splendor of the Divine.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE's address on the need for greater understanding among the religions of the world is printed in this magazine courtesy of the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles. Dr. Toynbee delivered the address at the First Congregational Church on March 31, 1963.

SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA was the founder of the Vivekananda-Vedanta Society of Chicago. His lecture on how to gain poise was given in 1935, two years before his untimely death. The editors of *Vedanta and the West* are grateful to Mallika Gupta for making this lecture available for publication.

ANN L. THOMPSON is a member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

SWAMI SMARANANANDA is a member of the Advaita Ashrama, a Ramakrishna Math center which publishes an English monthly and books in English and Hindi. The Swami has served both at Mayavati in the Himalayas and in the Ashrama's Calcutta office.

PRAVRAJIKA ATMAPRANA, a nun of the Ramakrishna Sarada Math, works at the Sister Nivedita School in Calcutta. Her recent book on *Sister Nivedita* was honored by the West Bengal government with an award for outstanding non-Bengali literature.

the title proposed, I had to abandon the piece without finishing it.

Now I am a Vedanta veteran. It has been apparent for some time that I am as "bad" as the other good people whose inadequate state of development once astonished me. Violent moods assail me. I am subject to temperamental outbursts. Patience is often wanting. I am not a beautiful character at all. I am still waiting for an answer to the question of why good people are so "bad." But now I count myself in their company.

The reason, of course, is that meditation has begun to make me—as it had already made the others—"authentic." Or perhaps the word is "honest." The goodness I once prided myself on was only skin deep. It consisted of an exterior manner cultivated for the purpose of easing my way through life. It sought to disguise, rather than to express, my true nature. It was meant to blind others, as it blinded me. But meditation is bringing me face to face with myself. It is making me frank, even guileless. It is causing me to give up hypocrisy. More and more I feel a necessity to accept, to be, and to express what I really am. The unpleasant things in me I no longer hide in a dark cellar where they can fester. They are brought up and taken outside where fresh air can disinfect them.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," Christ said, "for they shall see God." Sri Ramakrishna made a similar statement, that the essence of spiritual life is to make the heart and lips the same. The so-called unspiritual actions of the sincere aspirant, thus, are not unspiritual at all. They are marks of his progress. They reveal that he is becoming what he must become before he can see God—pure in heart, simple.

Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

STUDENT'S NOTEBOOK No. 29

When I first took up religious life I thought of myself as already well advanced. I saw my behavior as unusually moral, patient, and controlled. In human relations I believed my reactions to be ideal. It seemed only a matter of time before the goodness I felt I had attained should be crowned with an agreeable sainthood.

Considering how superior I felt myself to be, it was hard to understand why other aspirants were no farther advanced than they were. Senior monastics could be short-tempered, sharp-tongued, emotional. Devotees of long standing were subject to hurt feelings and jealousies. Most of my spiritual colleagues seemed, in fact, surprisingly limited in their development. I started to write an essay at this time, in which I tried to reason out this curious state of affairs. It was to be called: "Good People—Why Are They So Bad?" But, unable to find a satisfactory way of resolving the question

Concluded on page 64